



Harry Penhaul (1914 – 1997) Uncredited © The Artist's Estate

Harry Penhaul: Life Through a Lens

21 January - 18 April 2026

Penlee House Gallery & Museum

Morrab Road, Penzance TR18 4HE

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Harry Penhaul (1914 – 1957) was born in Gulval, Penzance and from a very early age had his sights firmly set on a career in photography. He served as an apprentice for four years with Messrs Lawley of the Terrace, Penzance, later setting up a partnership with another news photographer, Joe Churchward.

This partnership did not last long; Harry was progressing all the time, and could do everything from pressing the shutter, to delivering the final print. He had his own transport and darkroom, a supportive family and a desire to take photos so he launched himself into a solo career as a freelance photographer. However, World War Two intervened, and Harry volunteered and served with the Royal Artillery. At the end of the war, he immediately returned to his photographic work which continued until his death.

The essence of news photography is speed and whenever Harry wasn't rushing to the scene of an incident, he was dashing into Penzance to catch the London train with photos destined for national newspapers or magazines. His basic living, however, came from coverage of the social events that provide a photographer with his bread and butter.

What made Harry Penhaul special was his friendliness and good nature. He was known to the whole of West Cornwall, proved by the emergence of his nickname 'Flash Harry', which appeared on a carnival float one year and was universally recognised and adopted.

Since acquiring Penhaul's archive twenty-five years ago, we have been busy digitising the vast collection of over 6,000 prints and glass plate slides, staging exhibitions of his work every few years. This latest one-room show features some previously unseen images of life in and around west Cornwall in the 1950s, alongside some of his most well-loved images.

If you are able to identify any of the people in these photographs or can tell us anything about the event taking place, please complete a Comments Form. We would very much welcome your assistance.

Curated by Tamsin Chaffin, Collections Officer and Heather Lomas, Curatorial Assistant.

With thanks to Richard Nesham, former Technical Officer, for scanning the vast majority of the collection. Thanks also to his predecessors, Jeremy Rice and Nick Sharp, and to the many volunteers who have helped research and catalogue the archive over the years: Hilary Bawden, Marlene Bird, Linda Collins, Tony Cook, John Edwards, Rose Edwards, Liz Harman, Justus Hattam, Pauline Hope, Brian Martin, Roy Matthews, John McWilliams, Andrew Newport, Tony Pawlyn, Margaret Perry, David Prowse, Glyn Richards, Peter Scrase, Charles Symons, Jon Symons, Avril Taylor, John Uren, John Wallis, Micky West and Jane Williams.

Gallery 1

No. 1. Coco the Clown outside the Ritz Cinema, Penzance, 1957

Were you in this throng of children with Coco the Clown (Nicolai Poliakoff OBE) outside the Ritz? Here he was presenting road safety badges and certificates to the children (*The Cornishman* 8 Aug 1957). He was such a well-loved character that when, in 1953 he was made bankrupt due to tax arrears, he received hundreds of contributions from children who sent sixpences and shillings to alleviate his distress. Recently the Ritz has undergone a redevelopment and once again plays a part in the cultural life of Penzance.

No. 2. Harry Penhaul outside Penzance Police Station, 1955

A rare portrait of Harry Penhaul himself, this image accompanied an article in *The Cornishman* after Harry spotted and pursued escaped convict Cyril Michael Bond. Bond had escaped Dartmoor prison and hid out in Penzance for several days before his dramatic discovery by Harry on Penzance sea front.

No. 3. Top: Geevor miners, 1950s

Miners Dickie Dodd and Joe Wall in front of Victory Shaft with its newly installed steel headgear

and electric winder. In Douglas Williams's book *West Cornwall Camera* this image is captioned "A typically robust study of two Geevor tin miners".

No. 4. Bottom: Two young men, 1950s

Two unidentified young men working at an unidentified location. Penhaul had an eye for strong, interesting character portraits.

No. 5. Picking daffodils, 1950s

Mrs Ruth Wallis, née Ruth Hosking Williams, holding a basket of newly cut daffodils. From Skewjack, near Sennen, Mrs Wallis later lived at Roskestal Farm, St Levan. In the 1950s and '60s the daffodils were always picked in full bloom to send away. Nowadays they are harvested in bud.

No. 6. Repairing nets, Newlyn Harbour, 1950s

Phillip Paynter of St Ives mending pilchard nets aboard the boat *Our John*.

No. 7. Top: Catching up with all the news, Halsetown, 1950s

Neighbours Mr Jim Ellis and Mrs Annie Curnow catching up with the local news at a cottage gate.

No. 8. Bottom: Donkey and Child, 1950s

We have no name for either the patient donkey, or the child who looks distinctly unamused in this photograph.

No. 9. Three January lambs, Manor Farm, Pendeen, 1956

Wendy Tunmore with lamb triplets born on Manor Farm, Pendeen, January 1956. Penhaul likely took this picture as lamb triplets are an unusual occurrence.

No. 10. Top: Motorcycle scramble, The Kennels, Madron, 1955

An unknown motorcyclist takes to the air at a motorcycle scramble, an adrenaline-fuelled race with jumps over rough terrain. The West Cornwall Motor Club held the first scramble in Cornwall at The Kennels, Madron, in September 1949 and these events gained in popularity throughout the 1950s. A *Cornishman* article from 26 May 1955 reported that a recent scramble at Madron had attracted “a record attendance” with “entries from as far away as Devon.”

No. 11. Bottom: Tip Cunane and the White Lotus, c.1955

Amateur racing driver Thomas George ‘Tip’ Cunane in his Lotus Mark VIII. Due to its striking colour, this car was known as ‘The White Lotus’. Cunane drove it at races across the country, bringing it to Cornwall for the Trengwainton Hill Climb between 1955 - 1957.

No. 12. Lighthouse Keeper relieved from duty, Wolf Rock, 1950s

Lighthouse keeper J. S. Hughes being relieved from duty at Wolf Rock. Hughes is perilously transported from the lighthouse to a Trinity House relief vessel via a system of ropes and pulleys. This was the only way of getting people on and off the lighthouse. Three lighthouse keepers at a time would serve a two-month spell of duty, but as the transfer was weather dependent going home could sometimes be delayed by bad sea conditions.

No. 13. One man and his dog, 1950s

A strong portrait of a man and his dog, the soft coat of the dog contrasting with the granite wall.

No. 14. Top: Dorothy Yglesias with a seagull, 1950s

Dorothy Yglesias established the Mousehole Wild Bird Hospital and Sanctuary in 1928 with her sister, the artist Phyllis Yglesias. Dedicated to rehabilitating injured wild birds and returning them to their natural habitats, the sisters ran the hospital until 1953.

Alongside this work, Dorothy was an author who wrote about her passion for birds and the work of the hospital in *The Cry of a Bird* (1962) and *In Answer to the Cry* (1978). In recognition of her services to bird conservation,

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Dorothy was awarded an MBE in 1980.

No. 15. Bottom: Rescued seal, St Ives, 1956

A baby seal, who washed up three times in St. Ives and Hayle, seen on the sofa with artist Robert Brennan. It was finally rescued from Porthgwidden beach in November 1956 and Mr Brennan put it in his bath for safe keeping, before the RSPCA took it to Mousehole Wild Bird Hospital.

No. 16. Top: Antony Penhaul and chicks, 1950s

Antony Penhaul, Harry's nephew with an armful of chicks. Antony often appeared as an appealing extra in some of Harry's staged shots.

No. 17. Bottom: Mr & Mrs Ernest White with 'Monkey' the cat, St Ives, 1956

Monkey the cat was exhibit number one at St Ives Magistrate Court in December 1956 after being the victim of a 'cat' burglar. A Camborne woman was fined £5 for the theft of the cat, and Monkey was safely returned to owners Mr and Mrs White. The Cornishman reported that Monkey was the biggest cat in St. Ives, weighing 17lb and measuring one yard long.

No. 18. Bert Riddington, council worker, 1950s

Bert Riddington worked for Hayle Town Council as a roadman, maintaining the hedges and ditches. Penhaul has captured Bert with his fine moustache and a Cornish shovel over his shoulder.

No. 19. Top: Woman wearing overalls, date unknown

There is no record of whether this is a posed shot or linked to a news story. The woman looks rather too clean to have been down a mine.

No. 20. Bottom: The ironing board, date unknown

Who is this mystery man ironing what looks like a pair of bloomers? There seems to be a strong link to the Lifeboats on the left and a very varied library on the right.

No. 21. All Aboard!, Penzance Railway Station, 1957

B. C. Trott, a guard of the *Cornish Riviera Express*, on his last trip from Penzance before his retirement after 41 years of service.

No. 22. Top: Kicking off at Camborne, 1952

Showing that Cornish women have long known how to kick a rugby ball, Mrs. J. Hamilton Hutton kicks off for Camborne Rugby XV to mark the presentation of a new ball by the Supporters' Club. The players in

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the background are Reg Carter, Dick Honeywell and Gary Harris.

No. 23. Bottom: One man and his pot, date unknown

We do not know the identity of this man, nor why he is so enamoured with this pot. An archaeological find dredged up by a fishing net? A skilled potter showing off his craft?

No. 24. Top: Shirley Wearne riding Mr Tippet's bike, 1956

One photograph with a direct link to Penlee House Gallery & Museum. This is Mr Tippet's bike which can be seen in the Social History gallery upstairs. *The Cornishman* (3 May 1956) reports "Miss Shirley Wearne tries her hand at riding the penny-farthing bicycle which was given last week to Penzance Museum by Mrs. Pawlyn, of Newlyn. The bike is over 100 years old". Riding the exhibits is not something we condone now!

No. 25. Bottom: The Bugler, 1950s

An unknown bugler sits alone on the rocky shore. His cap features a badge with a sailing pennant and capital 'S' and the word 'Scillonian' around the edge.

No. 26. Annie Trudgeon outside Trudgeon Grocers, Market Jew Street, 1949

Annie Trudgeon stands stoically next to the shop she ran with her sister for nearly 40 years. Sited

on Market Jew Street, it was demolished in January 1949 by the Penzance Gas Company who owned the premises.

No. 27. May Day children's group, Mousehole, 1953

One of the 'bread & butter' shots that Harry took of local high days and holidays. This shows the Mousehole May Day group taken on the bank behind the North (new) Pier. From left to right, Back: Lucille Jolliffe, Caroline Humphreys, Angela Humphreys, Madeline Quick, Kathleen-Mary Hoare, Marilyn Rees, Angela Richardson, Vivienne Madron (or Stokes?), Karen Brockman, Jackie Ladner, Felicity Halse (Joan Richardson - behind). Front: Romula Tregenza, Sandra Cotton, Caroline Torrie, Queen - Rachel Tregenza (seated).

No. 28. Top: Penzance Carnival Queen, 1954

Looking regal as she goes about her duties is 1954 Penzance Carnival Queen, Pamela Mitchell. Other pictures from the carnival show her with her attendants visiting West Cornwall Hospital.

No. 29. Bottom: Mr John Bowden, Heamoor, Penzance, 1955

This dapper gentleman standing at his garden gate was Mr John Bowden, of 13 Holly Terrace, Heamoor. Featured in *The Cornishman*, 8 December 1955, having reached the age of 96 that

week. He was a keen cinema goer and football fan.

No. 30. Falcon rescue, 1950s

Unnamed RSPCA officer with a rescued falcon. Do you recognise the man who lived at Tencreek Avenue, Penzance?

No. 31. Mousehole Carnival Queen, 1950s

A fine view of Mousehole framed by the gate and Mousehole Carnival Queen Colleen Praed. Taken in the 1950s 'up the mountains' at the end of Love Lane.

No. 32. The Boase Sisters at Porthgwarra, date unknown

The Boase Sisters posed with crab pots. From left to right we see Elizabeth Mavis Curnow (nee Boase), Zena Boase and Dolores Boase. The family owned Boase's Fruit Shop on the Terrace in Penzance.

No. 33. Thirsty work, Tolver Farm, Gulval, 1955

One of Penhaul's 'staged' photographs, shows Dennis Thomas, sitting on a tractor drinking out of a watering can on a hot haymaking day.